

A Reflection on the Merapi-Merbabu Manuscripts

Abimardha Kurniawan

Airlangga University, Jl. Mayjen Prof. Dr. Moestopo No.47, Pacar Kembang, Kec. Tambaksari, Surabaya, East Java 60132

abimardha.kurniawan@fib.unair.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of reflections on the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection which has been the focus of the author's studies so far. This reflection is directed at exploring sources of Old Javanese literary texts from outside Bali. Since the discourse on "chacography" spread at the beginning of the 20th century, sources of Old Javanese texts from outside Bali have been almost neglected, especially sources from Java. Through this exploration, it can be seen that sources from outside Bali have their own versions and are different from the Balinese version. This has consequences for the study of philology. The question that may arise is: which is more authoritative, texts from Bali or Java? This problem needs to be addressed carefully. At this step, textual variation needs to be understood as a reality that enriches the spectrum of literary texts. Textual variations are the result of active interpretation from readers who ennoble literary works.

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1. Introduction

So far, there has been an opinion that Bali is a "living museum" for Javanese culture from the pre-Islamic period. After Islam entered and spread almost throughout the island of Java, the Hindu-Buddhist cultural heritage was suppressed and is still alive in Bali [1-3]. The life of Old Javanese language literature is still preserved with a legacy of lontar manuscripts recording great works such as the *kakawin of Rāmāyaṇa*, *Arjunawiwāha*, *Arjunawijaya*, *Sutasoma*, etc. Moreover, after Professor J.H.C. The existence of "chacography" which infected Old Javanese text sources originating from Java [4], and was then followed by scholars of Old Javanese literature afterwards [6-7], then the sources Bali is almost the only reference for the study of Old Javanese literature. Even P.J. Zoetmulder's magnum opus entitled *Kalangwan: A Survey of* [7] relies only on sources from Bali. Ancient Javanese text sources originating from Java are more often overlooked. As time goes by, we are increasingly aware that the sources of Old Javanese texts from Java also convey interesting impressions and are worth looking into further.

There are several important areas on the island of Java that contain sources of Old Javanese texts, such as (1) the Ciburuy district in Garut Regency, West Java; (2) the Merapi-Merbabu mountains in Central Java; and (3) the Tengger mountains in East Java. This article

does not discuss all of these areas, but only the Merapi-Merbabu area. Apart from being a concentration of my study interests, manuscript collections from this area also still require a lot of attention from researchers. Although studies of the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection have begun to be carried out since the publication of the *Katalog Naskah Merapi-Merbabu Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia* [8], most of them are still oriented towards producing text editions. As stated by [9], a study of one manuscript from this collection will make an important contribution, but efforts to explore the substance of the text will provide more value. Therefore, introducing this collection to the public is a step that must be taken. It would be very interesting if many researchers from various scientific backgrounds came and were involved in collaborating. Thus, this collection does not only belong to one scientific field. The Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection has multi-perspective scientific value.

Perhaps there is still a lot that needs to be done for the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection. However, the purpose of this article is simply to express reflections on my experience of researching this manuscript collection for decades. First, maybe we need to remember what this Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection actually is about, because I am sure there are still many who do not have complete information regarding this collection (*although I doubt that this article will satisfy the public's curiosity!*). Second, I feel the need to convey that careful reading of manuscript texts from the Merapi-Merbabu collection is required. There is something that needs to be realized together, namely the problem of textual variations in sources from Merbabu. This problem has actually been the concern of philologists for several decades. However, this still needs attention. For example, the Arjunawijaya kakawin text in one of the manuscripts from the slopes of Merbabu [8], has two cantos more than the sources from Bali. *Why is that? So, which one is more authoritative?* Such a reality does not only occur in the Arjunawijaya text. This issue will probably trigger a long debate. A proportional attitude is needed to deal with problems like that.

2. Method

What is meant by the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection is a collection of manuscripts produced in the Merapi-Merbabu mountain area in Central Java. The term "Merapi-Merbabu" is used to refer to this collection based on the toponymy mentioned in the colophon of the manuscripts. Most of the colophons of the manuscript mention the ancient names of Mount Merbabu, such as Damalung, Pamrihan, and Kaniṣṭan. Others

mention the ancient name for Mount Merapi, namely *Maṇḍarāgni*. A small number of texts mention other mountains such as Mount Ungaran and Mount Telamaya, including mountains that are relatively far from the Merapi-Merbabu area, namely Mount Lawu and Mount Wilis. When tracing the history of this manuscript collection, [10] called it the "Merbabu collection" on the grounds that before being transported to Batavia, the manuscripts were found in a village on the western slopes of Mount Merbabu. The matter of naming may be arbitrary. Each researcher has their own reasons. Therefore, in this section it is necessary to briefly discuss the history of the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection, most of which is currently stored in the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta.

3. Results and Discussion

The existence of the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript was made known to the public around 1822 through a cultural survey initiated by Governor General Baron van der Capellen. The manuscripts belonged to a priest's family who lived in a village on the western slopes of Mount Merbabu. These manuscripts are no longer read, but their owners still treat them with great respect as ancestral heritage. The colonial government wanted to buy it. Unfortunately, the owner did not provide it. After a cursory examination of the manuscripts, the government decided not to acquire them. The contents of the manuscripts were considered by them to be of little importance. Even so, efforts to get it still exist. Some three decades later, the effort finally succeeded. The heirs handed over the manuscripts to the Bataviaasch Genootschap for scientific purposes. Genootschap handed over a box of gold betel worth f. 350 instead. The manuscripts finally moved from their original place to Batavia. In fact, a small part of the collection is currently stored in a number of collections abroad.

The Merapi-Merbabu manuscript has a number of distinctive characteristics. All the manuscripts are made from palm leaf (*Borassus flabellifer*). Although there are a number of manuscripts made from *gebang* (*Corypha gebanga*), one of which is the *Dharma Patañjala* manuscript [11], it is certain that they do not originate from the Merapi-Merbabu environment. The manuscripts made from *gěbang* generally come from West Java. Indeed, intense relations between the hermitage on Mount Merbabu and spiritualists from West Java have existed for a long time. This is recorded in the story of the famous journey of *Bujangga Manik* [12]. Apart from that, the Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts are written in a distinctive form of script. This script is called "Buda script". The term buda in this context refers to a phase of Javanese culture that has not been influenced by Islam. There are also those who call this type of script "mountain script" because it is often found in mountainous areas.

Whatever you call it, the type of script used in the Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts is a continuation of the type of script used in 15th century Old Javanese inscriptions, such as the inscriptions from *Ngadoman* (Merbabu), *Pasrujambe* (Semeru), and *Widodaren* (Semeru). At least, this form of script is used as a guide to identify the identity of manuscripts from the Merapi-Merbabu area, although not all manuscripts in the collection use this type of script. A small number of manuscripts also use Javanese script. Arabic letters are also used, although only limited to diagrams (*rajab*).

The chronology of the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript stretches between the 15th century and the early 18th century. This time period can be determined based on the year numbers written on the colophons of the manuscript. This means that in the span of around two centuries literary activities took place in the scriptoria of the Merapi-Merbabu area. When it was first discovered by the colonial government in 1822, literary activities that produced Buddhist script in the area had stopped completely. According to the latest information, the oldest manuscript in this collection is Sang Hyang Hayu MSS Jav 53 which is currently part of the collection of the British Library, London. The number 1419 is written on the colophon of the manuscript. When converted to AD the result is 1497 [13]. The date of that manuscript can be used as a starting point (*terminus a quo*) for literary activities in the Merapi-Merbabu area. Meanwhile, the youngest fragment of the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript is contained in the National Library manuscript no. 24 L 149, i.e. 1673 *Śaka* (ca. 1751 A.D.). We see that the production of the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript took place over a long period of time.

Meanwhile, the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection documents various kinds of texts. A summary of the text in each manuscript can be viewed through the catalogue of [8]. This catalogue is indeed more informative than previously published catalogues [14-16]. The Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts contain texts from *itihāsa* works, speech or *tattwa*, *wariga*, *śasana*, as well as ritual texts containing various kinds of mantras. Among all these types, ritual texts are the most numerous in this collection. Seeing this reality, we can understand the orientation of the people who use these texts. It seems they are very ritualistic oriented. However, on the other hand, what cannot be ignored are the Islamic texts in this collection such as Nabi Aparas, Tapēl Adam, Sadat Jati, etc. [17-18]. However, these Islamic texts are functionally within the religious system of society in the Merapi-Merbabu scriptorial environment.

So far, no classification has been carried out on the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection based on the substance of the text, such as the classification model that has been carried out for the *Balinese lontar-lontar* collections of *Gedong Kirtya*, *Singaraja* [19]. This

is very possible considering that the text content of the Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts is basically similar to Bali. Presumably, I will take two categories in the *Kirya* classification system, namely *Wariga* (III) and *Itihāsa* (IV). Next, we will find out which texts from the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection are included in that group.

Wariga

- a. *Wariga: Basundari Roṇḍon, Rēspati Kalpa, Cacaṇḍen*, etc.
- b. *Tutur: Tattwajñāna, Sang Hyang Hayu, Uttaraśabda*, etc.
- c. *Kāṇḍa: Caṇḍakaraṇa, Kṛtabhāṣa*, etc.
- d. *Usada: Parimbwan, Primbon Paḍukunan*, etc.

Itihāsa

- a. *Parwa: Uttarakaṇḍa, Sabhaparwa, Bhiṣma Prawa, Pramana Prawa*, etc.
- b. *Kakawin: Arjunawiwāha, Arjunawijaya, Kakawin Sena*, etc.
- c. *Kidung: Gita Mudaśara, Gita Sinangsaya, Kidung Artati*, etc.
- d. *Gaguritan: Damarwulan*, etc.

The efforts made by Kartika Setyawati, Kuntara Wiryamartana, and Willem van der Molen to inventory the Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts are indeed worthy of praise. They have separated the Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts from thousands of manuscripts in the National Library's collection, then recorded them in a catalogue. It seems that efforts to classify the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript collection could be an agenda for future research.

Philological Consequences

If we read the text documented in the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript, we must be prepared for the textual variations in it. Especially, if we compare it with sources from Bali. As stated in the previous section, the text of kakawin Arjunawijaya in the ms. Perpustakaan 86 L 2019 manuscript, which was copied on the northeast slope of Mount Merbabu, will undoubtedly be different from the text in manuscripts originating from the Balinese tradition. The Arjunawijaya text of the Merbabu tradition has two additional pupuh after the 63rd pupuh. Is the patched part an interpolation added later? The thing to remember is that the chronology

of the manuscript from Merbabu is earlier than the sources from Bali. The two additional *cantos* basically emphasize the reasons why Citrawati, the consort of Arjunakartawirya, performed *satī* for the sake of her loyalty to her husband. Citrawati heard the news that her husband had been killed on the battlefield. The news was spread by a *rakṣasa* disguised as a holy man (*sadhu*). If the Balinese sources do not mention the name of the giant who spread the false news, then the source from Merbabu states that he is Śukhaśāraṇa. The text from Merbabu also describe in detail how the Arjuna's wife performed *satī* rituals which were equivalent to yoga practices [6].

Apart from that, the kakawin Arjunawiwāha text in one of the manuscripts from Merbabu (MP 165) also has its own characteristics. A study conducted by [20] shows that there is one additional stanza in the first canto, namely stanza 1.8A.

*nāhan lwir nikang antyasoca winangun ndan lwir nikāṅg
apsarī.
sang kocap pinamadyakēn madhu miñak lwirnyāmṛteng
kumbha mās.
tūs ning tirtha kukus ning ertali sirat ning toya Ganggā
dṛdha.
yekā snāna nira n winimba sinamādhi dhyātmikeng
Manmatha. [20]*

(These the supreme kinds of gems that composed into the shape of nymphs. It is said they are purified with honey, butter, and any kind of nectar in the golden vessel. The little stream of water, the cloud of waterfall, and the splash of the powerful Ganges water, that are their ablution when they are shaped through the spiritual meditation by *Kāmadewa*.)

This additional stanza is not found in sources from Bali, even including sources in Merbabu itself. Wiryamartana believes that the additional stanza functions as a balance. This means that the nymphs (*apsarī*) sent by Indra to interrupt Arjuna's tapa also received the initiation process (*abhiṣeka*) like Arjuna, because these nymphs would later act as śakti for Arjuna [20]. This is the important value of the textual variations contained in the sources from Merbabu. These textual variations imply that sources from Merbabu place great emphasis on ritualistic aspects. This is what is also seen in the Arjunawijaya text from Merbabu.

Textual variations are caused by both intentional and unintentional actions. Textual variations that arise due to accident are more technical in nature, and usually take the form of typographical errors or less significant variations. On the other hand, textual variations exist intentionally, meaning that the copyist made changes to the text with specific aims and objectives. Apart from his role in the text transmission process, a copyist basically also acts as a reader who has freedom of interpretation. This is the main problem in philological studies. A philologist might ask questions like the following: “*How can textual variation exist? What are the reasons that encourage the presence of these textual variations? Do the textual variations represent the views of the community of users and supporters of the text?*” Maybe there are still many more questions. That kind of sensitivity is what a philologist needs.

When I researched the text of *Uttaraśabda*, one thing struck me. I compared the *Uttaraśabda* text contained in the Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts with manuscripts from Bali. As a *tattwa* literary work containing descriptions of yoga, *Uttaraśabda* considers it important to purify the soul through the process of “ascent upwards” (*utkrānti*) or in traditional Balinese language referred to as *ngili ātma* (flowing the soul). In the *Uttaraśabda* text this process is carried out through seven specific points in a practitioner's body. The seven points are symbolized as the seven elements that form the sacred syllable OM which are called *Sapta-Oṃkāra*. Apart from that, the *Uttaraśabda* text also emphasizes *Rwa-Bhineda* which also has a role in the *kalēpan* process. Thus, if we pay attention to the *Uttaraśabda* text in the sources from Merapi-Merbabu. On the other hand, if we read the *Uttaraśabda* text from Balinese sources, we will not find a description of *Sapta-Oṃkāra* or *Rwa-Bhineda*. Of course, both are common topics in *tattwa* texts in Bali. However, why is this absent in *Uttaraśabda*?

Often, descriptions of *Sapta-Oṃkāra* and *Rwa Bineda* residing in a practitioner's body are esoteric knowledge. Not just anyone can access it. This impression can be found in the *Jñānasiddhānta* when discussing these two topics [21]. Even the discussion about *Sapta-Oṃkāra* is said to be *parama rahasya tēmēn-tēmēm* which means ‘truly very secret’. Therefore, it is possible that the presence or absence of such esoteric discussion implies the scope of the audience addressed by each version. If the Balinese version of *Uttaraśabda*, which does not have esoteric parts, is aimed at general readers, then the Merapi-Merbabu version of *Uttaraśabda* only reaches limited readers, namely religious groups who already have the authority to live and practice these esoteric teachings [22]. Thus, one *Uttaraśabda* text can have two different functions and users.

Thus, we understand that when the text is still being read and has users, the presence of text variations cannot be avoided. The description above may still be limited to two traditions, namely Bali and the Merapi-Merbabu scriptoria. If we compare it with other broader traditions, perhaps the textual variations we find will be even more diverse. So, how do we deal with textual variations in sources from various traditions? The classical philological paradigm places authoritative texts as the main target. Tracking the archetype is a path that must be pursued seriously. This paradigm is oriented to restore the text as close as possible to the original. However, this is not always easy and must reach all witness texts that still exist in present time. However, the conclusions obtained through archetype tracking efforts are always hypothetical due to a number of source and methodological limitations. There is no other way, a philologist who chooses this path must be humble and present his contribution to future collective work.

Therefore, we need to consider each manuscript as having important value in the history of the transmission and reception of texts in a specific context. The text written in a manuscript is a trace that a literary work has lived and found its readers. Every text documented in a manuscript has its own authority. So, the text of a literary work is something fluid and continues to evolve following changes in reader perceptions, cultural dynamics, and even political views which may contribute to the presence of textual variations. For the time being, we may need to place Old Javanese literary texts from Balinese and Merapi-Merbabu sources in their respective contexts, without having to justify one as being more authoritative than the other. Both have their own cultural values. This is not something that destroys the text of a literary work, but actually enriches the spectrum of its reception. As the motto says, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, although different, is essentially still one. Diversity is what actually prevents a literary work from becoming extinct. Diversity is a sign that a literary work continues to be read and is preserved.

4. Conclusion

In closing, I will repeat the main points of this reflection. Exploration of sources of ancient Javanese literary texts from outside Bali is an effort that must be made. This is not merely to re-evaluate the "academic myth" that has existed since colonial period in the past, but to open up opportunities for the Old Javanese philology which is often considered has slow progression. Apart from that, this exploration will also challenge our knowledge and test our attitude as researchers of Old Javanese literature when dealing with the textual sources from diverse traditions. Philology is a science that requires extraordinary precision. Every

manuscript, every textual source, indicated has a unique value, because every manuscript is produced in a unique cultural context. From there, we understand that there are skilled people involved in their production process. They have contributed the time, effort, and ideological views that they hold firmly, so that the traces of their work can be seen through every stroke of the script. This is why philology is an inseparable part of the humanities sciences.

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